

Lake Compounce and Quassy host 20th Golden Ticket Awards

New England parks welcome GTA guests for first time

BRISTOL and MIDDLEBURY, Conn. — New England is rich with parks, ranging from the modern to the nation's most historic.

Attendees to *Amusement Today's* 20th annual Golden Ticket Awards visited the oldest, continuously-operated amusement park in the U.S., **Lake Compounce**. On Sept. 9, park owners and operators, manufacturers and industry professionals gathered at "The Networking Event of the Year," culminating in the awards ceremony that honored The Best of the Best. Held in the park's historic Starlight Theater, the ceremony acknowledged winners interspersed between musical showstoppers provided by sponsor **RWS Entertainment**.

With daytime hours dedicated to enjoying all the park had to offer, including the award-winner Boulder Dash wooden roller coaster, the schedule also featured behind-the-scenes tours of revenue areas, maintenance areas and the setup for the Haunted Graveyard, which gave attendees opportunities to share and discuss best practices.

Following the ceremony, the event concluded with a post-party at the Croc Pot located near the Starlight Theater and on the edge of the park's water park, Crocodile Cove. Live music, desserts, an open bar and fire pits made for a fitting ending and showcased the hospitality from Lake Compounce. As the Golden Ticket event has evolved in the new millennium, *Amusement*

Today staff have repeatedly been told that being able to visit and network in a social environment has been extremely beneficial and enjoyable.

In preparation for the event, park management was eager to showcase the attributes that make Lake Compounce special.

"Obviously, Boulder Dash is a 'can't miss' attraction," said **Jerry Brick**, general manager. "But a revamped Wildcat and Ghost Hunt are on the list as well. Phobia (Phear Coaster) should be great for the real thrill-seekers."

Brick is no stranger to Golden Ticket Awards ceremonies. "I think I am always impressed with the team members at the events," he told *Amusement Today*. "Our seasonal team is excited about hosting the event, and I know they will do a good job. I hope everyone attending the event will be impressed with the team."

Lake Compounce opened in 1846 and boasts the distinction of being the oldest continuously-operating park in America. Spread among the 332 acres is the water park, Crocodile Cove, numerous rides and the park's namesake lake. The park's Wildcat roller coaster, dating back to 1927, celebrates its 90th anniversary not only with some structural refurbishments, but also new trains provided by Great Coasters International.

"Hopefully our visitors will see the history and tradition of Lake Compounce blended with the new and innovative," said Brick. "We have 100-year-old rides and buildings and obviously newer toys. It is really interesting how we have been able to blend it."



Two of the last remaining trolley parks, **Lake Compounce (above)** and **Quassy Amusement Park (right)** hosted the 2017 Golden Ticket Awards. COURTESY LAKE COMPOUNCE; QUASSY AMUSEMENT PARK



Prior to the event's day at Lake Compounce, a Friday evening social at **Quassy Amusement Park** set the celebration in motion.

Quassy is one of only 11 parks in existence that started off as a trolley park — parks placed at the end of trolley lines decades ago to encourage passenger business on the weekends. An established stop in 1908 between Waterbury and Woodbury, the park gets its name from Lake Quassapaug. While houses and clubs adorn much of the land surrounding the lake today, the park continues to thrive, much due to the success of the Splash Away Bay water park included with admission. In 2011,

Quassy was elevated more into the big leagues with the addition of **Wooden Warrior**, a roller coaster from The Gravity Group, which delivers a lot of action in a compact, mid-sized structure.

Quassy Amusement Park and Lake Compounce are just 14 miles from each other, which made for a good New England pairing for this year's event. Both parks were eager to welcome industry professionals from around the world.

"We're excited and extremely delighted that the Golden Ticket Awards kickoff will be here at

Quassy on Friday evening. It's been a pleasure working with everyone at *Amusement Today* and Jerry Brick at Lake Compounce to coordinate the very special event," said **Eric Anderson**, president, Quassy Amusement & Waterpark.

A full recap of the weekend event will be featured in the Nov 1/Pre-IAAPA issue.

*All stories this issue
by Tim Baldwin
unless otherwise noted*

NEWSPAPER

POSTMASTER: Dated material.
PLEASE RUSH!
Mailed Monday, September 11, 2017

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
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FT. WORTH TX
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Congratulations to the Nominees and Winners of the Golden Ticket Awards 2017!

Thank you to Amusement Today,
Quassy Amusement Park and
Waterpark, and Lake Compounce
for hosting this amazing event.



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NEWSTALK

EDITORIAL: Gary Slade, gslade@amusementtoday.com

A Golden 'Thank You'



Slade

Each year *Amusement Today's* staff works hard along side our host parks to make sure our attendees have a wonderful two-day event. As the event continues to grow we must acknowledge that *AT* and our host parks could not offer this free event without the financial support of our many sponsors. We would like to take this moment to recognize them once again for their generous donations:

PLATINUM: Allied Speciality Insurance; Martin & Vleminkx The Ride Companies; Pepsi and RWS Entertainment Group.

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As special Thank You goes to **Ryan Stana** and the entire staff at **RWS Entertainment Group** for the countless hours, hard work and support they put into the Golden Ticket Awards show performance. Their team, a previous Golden Ticket award-winner, has shown why they are the "Best of the Best" for show production in our industry!

Finally, thank you to **Jerry Brick** and **Sara Frias** at **Lake Compounce** and **Quassy's Eric Anderson, George Frantzis II** and **Ron Gustafson** for their hard work as our Host Parks to showcase these two great traditional trolley parks to the industry.

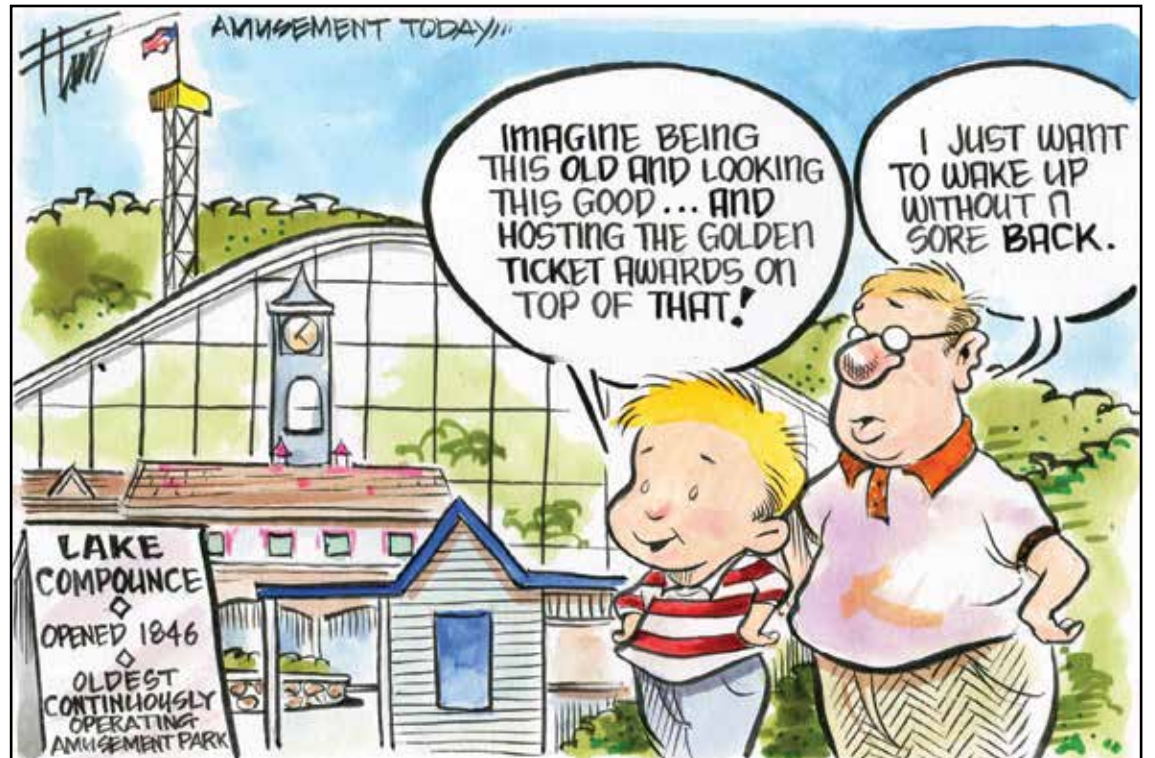
Replacement Golden Tickets offered: if your park or facility has won a previous Golden Ticket Award and that award has faded — or is beginning to fade — *Amusement Today* would like to replace the artwork for you at no charge. We know your facility is proud of your Golden Ticket wins as we see them on display throughout the park industry.

We realize there were a few years when printing methods changed that have caused about a three-year window of the awards printing to begin to fade. We want our Golden Tickets looking "Golden" for your visitors so let us help make them new again. But if you don't contact us, we don't know what to replace.

Please email **Savannah Breen** at sbreen@amusementtoday.com. Include the CATEGORY WIN NAME of the Golden Ticket Award and the YEAR.

AT plans to compile a list of replacement art through the IAAPA show and reprint all replacement awards in December. You will receive just the newly printed artwork for replacement in your existing acrylic brick.

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint



EDITORIAL: Tim Baldwin, tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

American Top 40

Now in its 20th year, the Golden Ticket Awards have focused a spotlight on what's popular, what's new and what's the best. If you were to line up the annual charts, one after another, it would remind me somewhat of the American Top 40 charts.

In my younger years, I would either listen each week, or find a publication that listed the song charts and see which songs and artists were moving up and which had peaked. How long could the No. 1 song stay at the top? Several weeks? Or just this once?

While the Golden Ticket Awards are annual and not weekly, there is still that similar sense of excitement. Who is moving up on the top notch? Who has landed on the charts for the first time? While there are always huge congratulations to the park, ride or company that has taken the Golden Ticket, it is equally as inspiring to see who made it into the list of finalists. Each year, different finalists move in and out of the charts. *AT's* coverage of our 2017 results are detailed in the pages throughout this issue.

Explore it. This accumulation of opinions of the largest collection of experienced park-goers is like a fine-tuned research document. People are noticing what they like about a park and what each park is doing.



Baldwin

Many people have commented to *Amusement Today* that they have planned trips around trying to get to the rides and parks that appear on our charts. Clearly, these people know they are bound to have a good time when they see what has garnered the attention of well-traveled park experts. Our panel is never the same year to year as new people are added and some are dropped, but it is always comprised of

people who truly treasure what the industry does. Their comments indicate that what amusement parks, water parks and theme parks do each day honestly matters to visitors — and thank heavens it does. Perish forbid the day ever arrives when people stop caring. That's why the Golden Ticket Awards are great at keeping us on our toes, always helping to push toward a greater goal.

More than anything else in the comparison of *AT's* charts to those of American Top 40 are the roller coasters. Be it park or manufacturer, to see who has multiple rides on the charts and how far they have climbed is exciting. Fans lament a decline in their favorites or cheer on the up-and-coming newer kids on the block. It's great fun.

As you read through these pages, put on your favorite song and be inspired by both.

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Amusement Today is an independent, privately-owned trade newspaper published 14 times per year by Amusement Today Inc., P.O. Box 5427, Arlington, Texas 76005. Print issues are \$50 per year and are mailed Presort Standard Postage (permit No. 2069) Pre-Paid Fort Worth, Texas. The entire contents of this newspaper, and its related websites, are Copyrighted and Trademarked 2017 by Amusement Today Inc., all rights reserved.

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2017 Publisher's Picks: Supplier, Park

Intamin celebrates 50 years of innovation

For most people in the industry, it is hard to imagine a time when high-profile rides were in short supply. A half century ago, that was quite the case. With a mere handful of theme parks in existence, the demand wasn't there. By the late 1960s, **Six Flags** had opened its second theme park, and a third wasn't far off in development. Before long, the country, if not the world, was in the theme park boom.

"By 1970, the park had matured. We had already put in all the shelf product that was available," said **Errol McKoy**, industry veteran and former Six Flags Over Georgia general manager. "We were put in a position to innovate."

Intamin, a company formed by **Robert Spieldiener** and friend **Ali Saiko** (later to be joined by Robert's brother, **Reinhold Speildiener**), had already begun providing a few rides to the Six Flags parks. Robert's belief that the company could continue to engineer and produce rides was proven correct. Six Flags and the fledgling theme park industry needed a company just like Intamin — one that was ready to innovate new ideas.

During the past five decades, many iconic rides — from towers to parachute rides — and industry staples such as the rapids ride have come from the minds at Intamin.

While flat rides and towers started the company, thrill rides and water rides soon became the company's calling card. Intamin's product line is virtually everywhere around the globe, and the company's contributions can't be overstated. Rapids rides, Shoot-the-Chutes and freefall rides became absolute essentials in the theme park market.

Just glancing at the top of the steel roller coaster charts in this very issue, one can see that Intamin has found enormous success building roller coasters as well. Having had partners and engineering talent that would eventually strike out on their own, Intamin continued to innovate and found spectacular acclaim with sleek new thrillers that pushed boundaries for steel roller coasters and even wood. Fan favorites across the U.S., Europe and beyond solidify Intamin's importance in the theme park industry.

With such a diverse catalog of product and hundreds and hundreds of rides providing thrills and smiles to all parts of the world, Intamin's success story couldn't be more well-deserved. *Amusement Today* congratulates Intamin, on the company's 50th anniversary, as the Publisher's Pick **Supplier of the Year**.



When the industry was looking for new, innovative rides, Intamin stepped in to supply new attractions. COURTESY INTAMIN



Roller coasters, water rides and numerous variations of tower rides have provided Intamin with half a century of iconic attractions. COURTESY INTAMIN; AT FILE PHOTO

Morgan's Wonderland grows its special message

Life doesn't always go as planned. Sometimes, the right person with the right vision turns an unfortunate situation into something glorious.

In 2005 **Gordon Hartman** made an observation. While vacationing with his wife **Maggie** and daughter **Morgan**, the family enjoyed some relaxation time at the hotel pool. Morgan was eager to play with the other children who were on vacation, but they did not want to interact with her. Morgan had special needs. She was different. At that moment, Gordon resolved to do something to make a difference. There needed to be places where people with and without disabilities could play together, not only to have fun, but have a further understanding that all people are different, and at the same time, have much in common.

Five years later, **Morgan's Wonderland** opened its doors in San Antonio. With the park being completely wheelchair accessible, there were numerous activities to engage people with and without cognitive or physical challenges — train rides, fishing, role play, musical instruments, car rides, playground equipment, a carousel and more. Parents were visibly moved when seeing their children participate in activities they never believed would be possible.

The park readily admits that they conveyed the concept of accessibility a little too firmly in the early years, and many people believed that only visitors with special needs could come. But the vision of the park is for people of all abilities to enjoy time together. In time, the message was clear and everyone felt welcome to come.

Growth continued and many sensory attractions and rides continued to fall into place, as well as an amphitheater entertainment space.

For this season, the park tackled a big problem. Texas can be hot. With more than two years in development and construction, Morgan's Inspiration Island welcomed visitors to get wet. With slides, spray areas, water activities and a boat ride (all supplied by **WhiteWater West**), the all-inclusive water park allows guests to beat the heat. The park has even provided waterproof wheelchairs for its guests, all at no charge. The themed areas and colorful buildings create a water oasis. [See full coverage of Morgan's Inspiration Island in *AT's* October issue.]

In just a few short years, this special non-profit park has welcomed more than a million guests from all 50 states and 67 other countries. For those with physical or cognitive special needs, admission is free. Nominal admission charges apply only to family and friends, as well as the general public.

With its ongoing mission to provide a safe, clean and beautiful environment free of physical and economic barriers that all individuals can enjoy, *Amusement Today* is honored to acknowledge Morgan's Wonderland as **Park of the Year**.



Morgan's Wonderland opened its gates to guests of all abilities in 2010.

AT/TIM BALDWIN



This year's addition was an incredible all-access splash park called Morgan's Inspiration Island. AT/TIM BALDWIN

2017 Publisher's Picks: Person

Jerry Brick keeps Lake Compounce's rich tradition alive and well

On October 6, 1846, **Samuel Botsford**, an influential Bristol scientist, persuaded property owner **Gad Norton**, an original settler descendant, to let him conduct "a series of beautiful experiments in electricity." Well publicized, the event drew thousands of spectators who witnessed the demonstration amidst the beauty of the woods and water. Although the final experiment of "blowing up from shore, two huge jugs of gunpowder tied under a raft in the middle of the lake" failed, it did inspire Norton to action. He put a path around the lake, set up picnic tables, allowed public swimming and rowing on the lake and built a gazebo for lakeside band concerts. **Lake Compounce** had officially opened to the public as a picturesque "picnic" park.

The Lake Compounce history is a rich one with many names and companies having their hand in its long-standing success.

Fast forward to 2009. That's when Lake Compounce was acquired by **Palace Entertainment** (part of the **Parques Reunidos** group) — its current caretaker of this heirloom attraction. Their commitment to the park is simple: to maintain a top-notch family entertainment venue, as well as providing superior guest service, all while continuing to introduce new product for the guests to enjoy.

Jerry Brick began his career with Lake Compounce in 1996 as the park's director of revenue, then director of operations. He became the park's general manager in 2004 and oversaw the transition of the park to today's ownership.

Anyone who has even met Jerry or been on a stroll with Jerry will tell you of his love, and knowledge, of the park's rich history and desire to make it the "Best of the Best." What I noticed during multiple walks through the park with Jerry over the years is his sense of people and community. One can walk

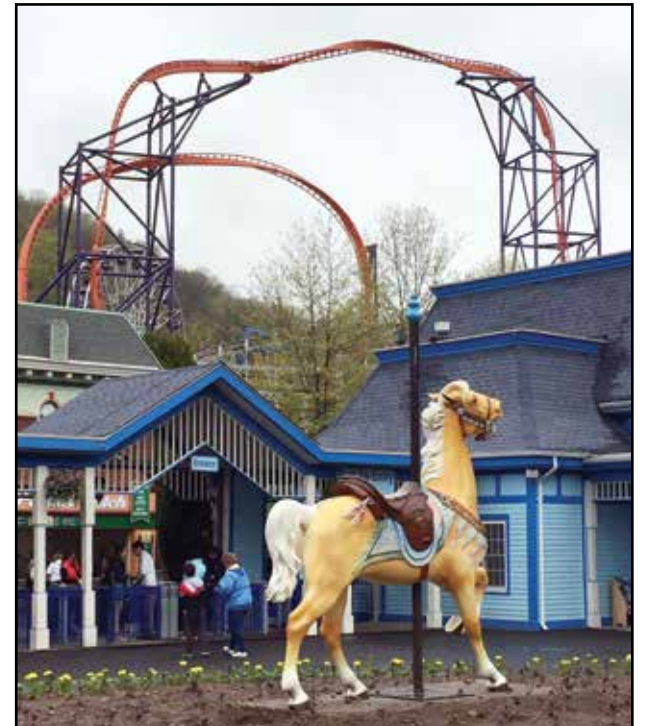


Jerry Brick's (above) passion for Lake Compounce has kept the park a seamless blend of a modern amusement facility and a traditional park.
COURTESY LAKE COMPOUNCE

no more than 100 yards in the park without being stopped and a conversation started up with a total stranger or someone he knows locally from church, the kids' sports practices, an upcoming school function or the neighbor down the street who came out to the park for the day.

Jerry's passion for the park has led to a tremendous growth of state-of-the-art roller coasters and a supporting mix of family rides. He has overseen the expansion of the popular **Crocodile Cove** water park and added **Bear Creek Campground**, a request by guests in their exit survey polls.

Last year saw the addition of the Phobia launch coaster from **Premier Rides**, giving the park an ultra-modern unique steel coaster. This year, the park



turned to **Martin & Vlemminckx Rides** to do a major rebuild of the classic Wildcat and touch up track work on the ranked Boulder Dash coaster. Not stopping there, Jerry turned to **Great Coasters International** for new Wildcat trains and had a new safety control system installed.

Lake Compounce may be the nation's oldest amusement park, but it is far from that once inside the gates as the mix of old and new blend in a seamless environment.

Jerry Brick's passion, and his commitment to a quality, thrilling and safe facility, catering to the New England family audience makes him *Amusement Today's* pick for **2017 Person of the Year**.

Amusement Today uses balanced regions for voting

Since *Amusement Today* introduced the **Golden Ticket Awards** in 1998, we continue to seek out the most experienced park enthusiasts to participate in our survey. *AT* follows a fair and balanced protocol of dividing our ballots between four geographical regions (see color map at right) of the United States. In addition to the hundreds of surveys sent to American enthusiasts, international fans are also sought out and we invite such fans to contact us for participation in future years. *Amusement Today* thanks the hundreds of voters who helped form this year's panel of experts and make the 2017 Golden Ticket Awards a reality.

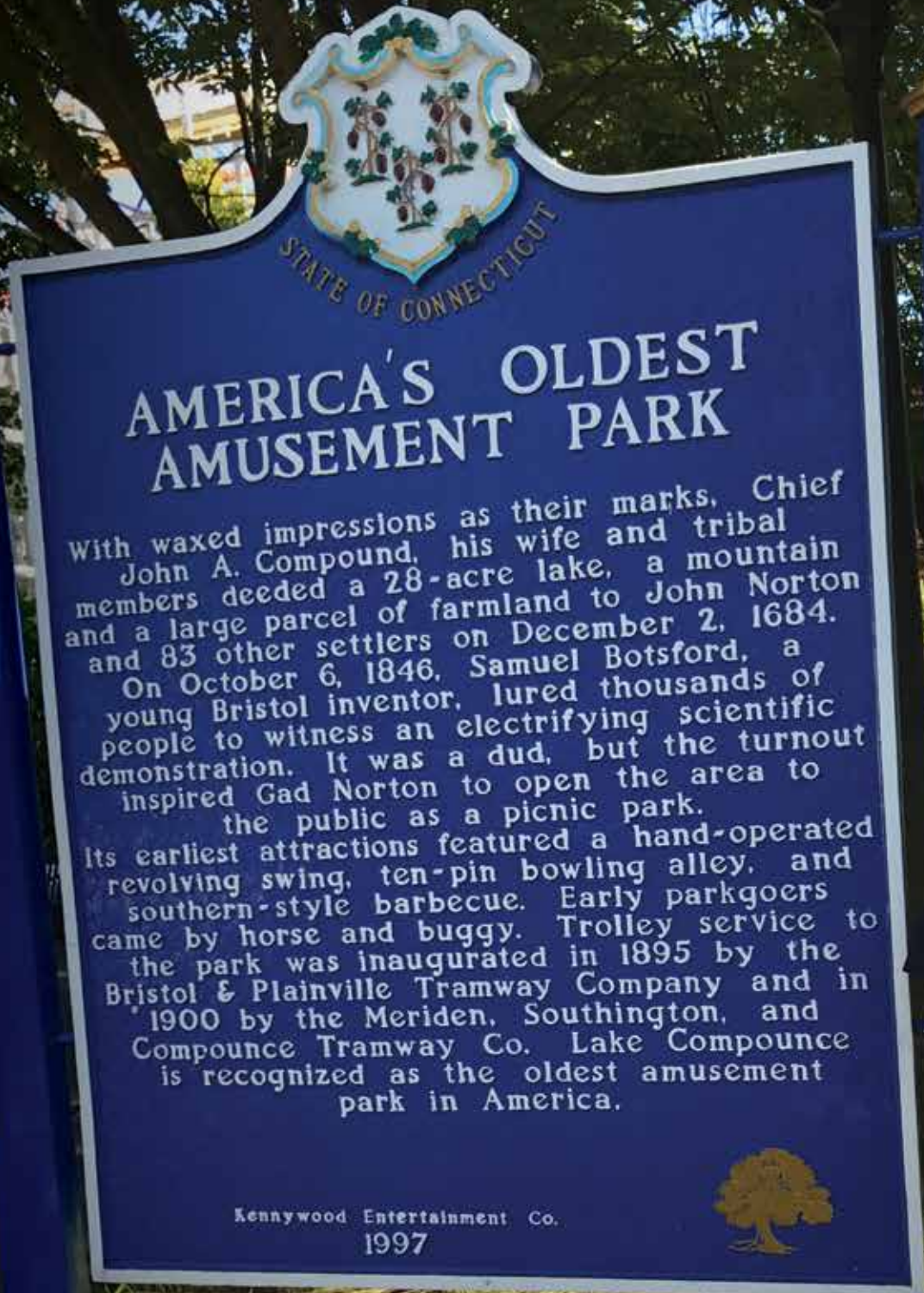
Are you a qualified candidate? Contact Golden Ticket Awards Communications Coordinator Tim Baldwin at tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com and we'll see if you would make a good representative for your region on next year's new panel.

Of note, park employees, manufacturers, and *Amusement Today* staff were not eligible to be on the 2017 panel.



⑤ – International Surveys

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GENERAL MANAGER,
JERRY BRICK!



New finalists challenge winners in park categories

Not all the Golden Ticket Awards categories have been around since the beginning. Over the course of two decades, only a handful have gone unchallenged. Sometimes a lock is assumed and then — to the surprise of the industry — change takes place.



One undefeated category is **BEST WATER PARK**. **Schlitterbahn** in New Braunfels, Texas, is the undisputed champ.

"Every year around this time we hold our breath because we are well aware of what a blessing it is to have been given this honor for 20 years," said Terri Adams, COO, Schlitterbahn Waterparks. "We earn our business every year, and given the growing talent and beautiful facilities in the industry, we never consider this award a given. We rely on every member of our team — from bottom to top — to deliver the kind of experience that will add us to a family's cherished summer memories."

Splashin' Safari in Santa Claus, Ind., has held the No. 2 position for 16 years. The top



two have formed a stronghold, and several challengers over the years have rotated through the finalists. A new contender rises this year. **Volcano Bay**, after only two months of operation, ranked No. 3 and outscored its Orlando brethren. The lush, high-capacity park has become the new must-do in the Central Florida region.

Dollywood's Splash Country moves down a notch to No. 4 and **Typhoon Lagoon** returns to the chart at No. 5.

BEST PARK:
Europa-Park (above)
BEST PARK No. 2:
Cedar Point (right)
COURTESY EUROPA-PARK;
AT/TIM BALDWIN

As an example of never counting a victory as granted, **Europa-Park** didn't just overtake the top spot overnight. For almost a decade, the Germany theme park climbed rung-by-rung up the **BEST PARK** category. Eventually it unseated the 16-year reigning champ and took the Golden Ticket in 2014. For a fourth year in a row, Europa-Park snags the prize.

"The Mack Family is continually investing in the park to continue their tradition of excellence," said Roland Mack, founder. "Awards like this confirm we are doing the right thing for our guests. We are very pleased and deeply honored to receive the Golden Ticket Award for Best Park 2017."

This year, Europa-Park installed its single biggest investment in an attraction, **Voletarium**.

Cedar Point continues to boast top park in the U.S. at No. 2. Also maintaining 2016 positions are **Dollywood** at No. 3 — which claims more Golden



BEST CHILDREN'S PARK: Idlewild & SoakZone
COURTESY IDLEWILD

Tickets and finalist placements than any other park — and **Knoebels Amusement Resort** at No. 4.

BEST PARK charts (No. 5) is the original **Disneyland**, often referred to as The Happiest

Finding itself back on the

► **See PARKS, page 10**



BEST WATER PARK: Schlitterbahn New Braunfels
AT/TIM BALDWIN

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► **PARKS**

Continued from page 7

Place on Earth.

BEST SEASIDE PARK has long been a close race. **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** (No. 1), **Morey's Piers** (No. 2) and **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** (No. 3) have had neck-and-neck battles for several years and the Golden Ticket has been a tug-of-war the past few. Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk takes the gold again this year. With new rides and an enhanced entrance, the seaside favorite looks better than ever. Morey's Piers moves up a notch regaining ground trying to reach the top as it did in 2015.

Gröna Lund continues its place on the charts. The Swedish seaside gem places at No. 4.

In the category of **BEST CHILDREN'S PARK**, **Idlewild & SoakZone** keeps its hold on the Golden Ticket. A finalist



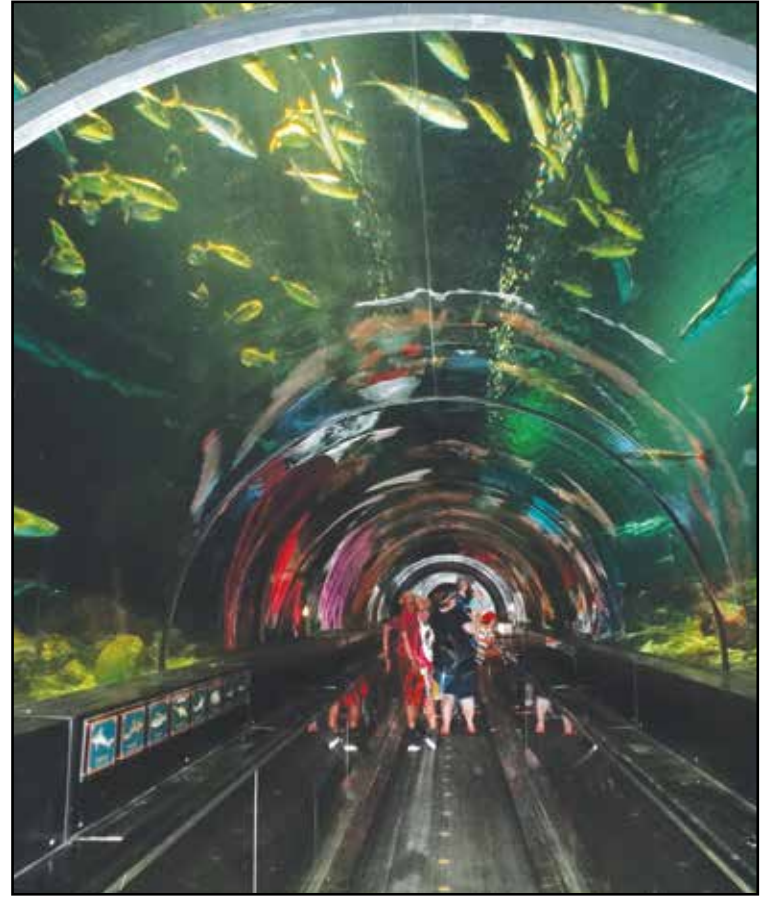
BEST WATER PARK No. 2: Splashin' Safari (above)
BEST MARINE LIFE PARK: SeaWorld Orlando (right)
AT/TIM BALDWIN

since the category was introduced in 2004, the small wooded park in Ligonier, Pa., has grabbed the gold since 2010, with this year making it eight years in a row.

The finalists, however, create a lot of movement and activity. **Storybook Land** in Egg Harbor Township, N.J., which appeared on the charts for the

first time in 2015, maintains a hold on the No. 2 spot. **Story Land** in Glen, N.H., made its debut in this category in 2013 and ranks No. 3 in 2017. New on the charts is first timer **Morgan's Wonderland** in San Antonio, Texas. This all-inclusive park welcomes children and

► See PARKS, page 12



PARK AND RIDE WINNERS

Ranked by percentage of votes cast



BEST NEW RIDE FOR 2017 (Amusement Park)

Mystic Timbers	Kings Island	45%
Flight of Passage	Disney's Animal Kingdom	15%
Mine Blower	Fun Spot America	8%
InvadR	Busch Gardens Williamsburg	7%
Wave Breaker: The Rescue Coaster	SeaWorld San Antonio	6%

BEST NEW RIDE FOR 2017 (Water Park)

Thunder Rapids	Six Flags Fiesta Texas	47%
Krakatau Aqua Coaster	Volcano Bay	31%
Point Plummet	Cedar Point Shores	7% (tie)
Miss Adventure Falls	Typhoon Lagoon	7% (tie)
Ko'okiri Body Plunge	Volcano Bay	4%

BEST PARK

Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	27%
Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	18%
Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	11%
Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	10%
Disneyland	Anaheim, Calif.	6%

BEST WATER PARK

Schlitterbahn	New Braunfels, Texas	57%
Splashin' Safari	Santa Claus, Ind.	17%
Volcano Bay	Orlando, Fla.	6%
Dollywood's Splash Country	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	4%
Typhoon Lagoon	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	3%

BEST CHILDREN'S PARK

Idlewild & SoakZone	Ligonier, Pa.	19%
Storybook Land	Egg Harbor Twp., N.J.	11%
Story Land	Bartlett, N.H.	9%
Morgan's Wonderland	San Antonio, Texas	8%
Gilroy Gardens	Gilroy, Calif.	7% (tie)
Legoland California	Carlsbad, Calif.	7% (tie)
Legoland Florida	Winter Haven, Calif.	7% (tie)

BEST MARINE LIFE PARK

SeaWorld Orlando	Orlando, Fla.	58%
SeaWorld San Diego	San Diego, Calif.	10%
Discovery Cove	Orlando, Fla.	8%
SeaWorld San Antonio	San Antonio, Texas	7%
Six Flags Discovery Kingdom	Vallejo, Calif.	6%

BEST SEASIDE PARK

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk	Santa Cruz, Calif.	31%
Morey's Piers	Wildwood, N.J.	26%
Blackpool Pleasure Beach	Blackpool, England	25%
Gröna Lund	Stockholm, Sweden	12%

BEST KIDS' AREA

Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	23%
Universal's Islands of Adventure	Orlando, Fla.	13%
Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands	10%
Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	9%
Paultons Park	Romsey, England	8%

CLEANEST PARK

Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	86%
Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	17%
Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	9%
Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	7%
Magic Kingdom	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	6%

BEST SHOWS

Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	46%
Six Flags Fiesta Texas	San Antonio, Texas	18%
Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	5% (tie)
SeaWorld Orlando	Orlando, Fla.	5% (tie)
Disney's Hollywood Studios	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	4%

BONUS COVERAGE

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► **PARKS**

Continued from page 10

families of all abilities and has just opened a new water park this season accommodating all visitors. This special park comes in at No. 4. Completing the results is a three-way tie for fifth place: **Gilroy Gardens** (Gilroy, Calif.), **Legoland California**



BEST MARINE LIFE PARK No. 2: SeaWorld San Diego
AT/TIM BALDWIN

(Carlsband) and **Legoland Florida** (Winter Haven).

SeaWorld Orlando has held tight to the **BEST MARINE LIFE PARK** since AT introduced the category in 2006.

“At SeaWorld Orlando, we are proud to offer our guests up-close animal encounters, thrilling attractions, and unique events all year. Through innovation and creativity, we continually seek new ways for families to learn more about our natural world while making memories that last a lifetime,” said Jim Dean, SeaWorld Orlando park president.

SeaWorld San Diego, the original, hangs on to the No. 2 spot. That park opened in 1964. Coming up two notches in the standings is **Discovery Cove**, the animal interactive experience in Orlando. **SeaWorld San Antonio** (No. 4) and **Six Flags Discovery Kingdom** (No. 5) fill out the chart.



BEST SEASIDE PARK: Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk
COURTESY SANTA CRUZ BEACH BOARDWALK



BEST SEASIDE PARK No. 2: Morey's Piers
AT/TIM BALDWIN



BEST CHILDREN'S PARK No. 2: Storybook Land
AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

PARK AND RIDE WINNERS

Ranked by percentage of votes cast



BEST FOOD

Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	25%
Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	23%
Epcot	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	17%
Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	11%
Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	5%

BEST WATER RIDE (PARK)

Valhalla	Blackpool Pleasure Beach	24%
Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls	Universal's Islands of Adventure	18%
Chiapas	Phantasialand	8%
Splash Mountain	Magic Kingdom	7%
Jurassic Park River Adventure	Universal's Islands of Adventure	6%

BEST WATER PARK RIDE

Wildebeest	Splashin' Safari	47%
Mammoth	Splashin' Safari	18%
The Falls	Schlitterbahn New Braunfels	14%
Master Blaster	Schlitterbahn New Braunfels	8%
Massiv	Schlitterbahn Galveston Island	6%

BEST INDOOR COASTER

Revenge of the Mummy	Universal Studios Orlando	24%
Space Mountain	Disneyland	11%
Winja's Fear & Force	Phantasialand	10%
Black Diamond	Knoebels Amusement Resort	9.5%

BEST DARK RIDE

Twilight Zone Tower of Terror	Disney's Hollywood Studios	16%
Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey	Universal's Islands of Adventure	10%
Haunted Mansion	Knoebels Amusement Resort	9.5%
Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man	Universal's Islands of Adventure	9%
Harry Potter / Escape from Gringotts	Universal Studios Orlando	8%

BEST LANDSCAPING

Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	31%
Gilroy Gardens	Gilroy, Calif.	15%
Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands	12%
Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	8%
Disney's Animal Kingdom	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	6%

BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT

Universal Orlando Resort	Orlando, Fla.	26%
Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, Calif.	20%
Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	10%
Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	6%
Busch Gardens Tampa Bay	Tampa, Fla.	5% (tie)
Six Flags Fiesta Texas	San Antonio, Texas	5% (tie)
Universal Studios Hollywood	Hollywood, Calif.	5% (tie)

BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT

Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	47%
Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	9%
Disneyland	Anaheim, Calif.	7% (tie)
Magic Kingdom	Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	7% (tie)
Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	5%

BEST CAROUSEL

Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	41%
Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk	Santa Cruz, Calif.	20%
Six Flags Over Georgia	Austell, Ga.	7%
Six Flags Great America	Gurnee, Ill.	6%
Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands	5.5%

FRIENDLIEST PARK

Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	39%
Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	16%
Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	11%
Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	10%
Alabama Splash Adventure	Bessemer, Alabama	5%

BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH ATTRACTION

Noah's Ark	Kennywood	32%
Ghost Ship	Morey's Piers	18%
Frankenstein's Castle	Indiana Beach	12%
Gasten Ghost Hotel	Liseberg	11%
Lustiga Huset	Gröna Lund	10%

BONUS COVERAGE

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- #8 Diamondback
Kings Island
- #10 Maverick®
Cedar Point
- #13 Intimidator® 305
Kings Dominion
- #17 Top Thrill Dragster®
Cedar Point
- #19 Intimidator®
Carowinds
- #22 Banshee®
Kings Island
- #23 Magnum XL-200
Cedar Point

TOP Wooden Roller Coasters

- #6 The Beast®
Kings Island
- #10 Gold Striker®
California's Great America
- #11 Mystic Timbers
Kings Island
- #18 Ghost Rider®
Knott's Berry Farm
- #25 Shivering Timbers®
Michigan's Adventure

BEST New Ride

- #1 Mystic Timbers
Kings Island

BEST Kids' Area

- #1 Kings Island

BEST Park

- #2 Cedar Point

BEST Halloween Event

- #2 Knott's Berry Farm

BEST New Water Ride

- #3 Point Plummet
Cedar Point

BEST Children's Park

- #5 Gilroy Gardens



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Winners showcase their Golden Ticket Awards



Proud industry winners have displayed their Golden Ticket acknowledgements in numerous ways. Carowinds showcases Fury 325's at its queue entrance, as does Cedar Point's Maverick (right). Below, PTC's awards greet visitors to its front lobby. COURTESY RON GUSTAFSON; AT/JOHN ROBINSON; AT/GARY SLADE



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Ride categories showcase crowd-pleasers

Ride categories: Disney keeps win following sudden takeover

As the Golden Ticket Awards were being formed and categories were finding their footing, **BEST DARK RIDE** originally started as Best Indoor Attraction in 1998. As simulators fell out of favor, the focus shifted specifically to dark rides, although that category itself is painted with a broad brush today. Numerous types of conveyances take riders through various scenes. Examples can reside in small traditional parks to mega theme park giants.

Universal Studios Orlando led the charge for 18 years, beginning with **Back to the Future: The Ride** to a long run with the **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man** once **Islands of Adventure** opened in 1999. The Florida resort topped itself with the opening of **Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey**. A dramatic coup took place last year with a photo finish revealing **Disney's Hollywood Studios** nudged out Universal for the Golden Ticket with **Twilight Zone Tower of Terror**. Disney has run further with it this year with a greater lead.

Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey stands at No. 2, followed by a close contender, the **Haunted Mansion** at **Knoebels Amusement Resort**. Voters have voiced their opinions that the Pennsylvania park has maintained a quintessential exam-



ple of what traditional dark rides of yesteryear were at their very best.

Universal claims three of the five finalists with **Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man** returning to the charts at No. 4, and **Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts** appearing on the chart for the first time at No. 5.

For a third year in a row (and fifth overall), **Valhalla** at **Blackpool Pleasure Beach** is awarded **BEST WATER RIDE**. Enhanced with scenes of animatronics, props, fog, waterfalls and fire, the drenching journey stimulates multiple senses. The attraction was supplied by Intamin.

Still at No. 2 is **Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls** at Universal's **Islands of Adventure**. The Mack flume draped in cartoon whimsy held the Golden Ticket for 12 years, often playing tug-of-war with winner **Valhalla**. The two attractions are the only water rides to hold the Golden Ticket in the 17 years of the category.

Rounding out the top five are finalists **Chiapas** (No. 3) at Germany's **Phantasialand**, **Splash Mountain** at **Magic Kingdom** (No. 4) and **Jurassic**



BEST WATER PARK RIDE: Wildebeest, Splashin' Safari
COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD & SPLASHIN' SAFARI

River Adventure, also at **Islands of Adventure**. It is the first time in GTA history for the latter attraction to place as a finalist.

Splashin' Safari's Wildebeest continues to wow water park voters. Since debuting in 2010, the ProSlide hydromagnetic water coaster has thrilled guests with its drops and speedy uphill sections.

"In a word? Air-time," said Paula Werne, director of communications. "Wildebeest simply doesn't let up. And for many of us, Wildebeest is a sentimental favorite, as it was Will Koch's final project. And Will loved air-time!"

Right behind it is the park's **Mammoth**. **Splashin' Safari** installed it two years following **Wildebeest**. **Mammoth** features six-passenger rafts in a round-seating configuration. Like its older sibling, the attraction features fast LIM technology uphill sections.

Rounding out the top five finalists are a trifecta from **Schletterbahn** properties. **The Falls**, which took Best New Ride (Water Park) in 2011, has been a crowd favorite. Located at the original park in New Braunfels, the 22-minute ride (one circuit) experience features multiple sections of rapids and an aquaveyor to keep the fun continuous. At the same park, **Master Blaster**, a former Golden Ticket holder for many years, scores No. 4; and the world's tallest uphill water coaster, **Massiv** at **Schletterbahn Galveston Island**, completes the Top Five.

Maybe it is the historic, carved wooden horses. Maybe

it is the authentic band organ. Grabbing for the brass ring is key. All of this adds up to **BEST CAROUSEL**. **Knoebels' Grand Carousel** not only has the brass ring, but also has been the only carousel to hold the Golden Ticket in this undefeated category.

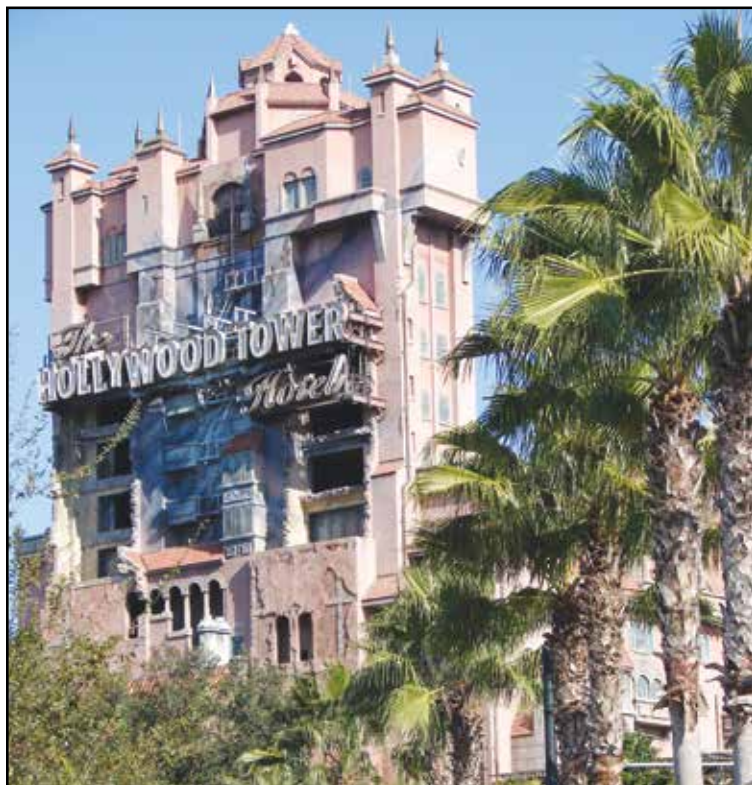
Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk (No. 2) and **Six Flags Over Georgia** (No. 3) sit comfortably in the same posi-

tions from 2016.

New to the list of finalists is **Kennywood** and the park's **Grand Carousel** (No. 4). Built in 1926 and installed at the park in 1927, the Dentzel carousel features music from an authentic 1916 Wurlitzer Military Band Organ.

A tie for fifth place puts two previous finalists in a head-to-

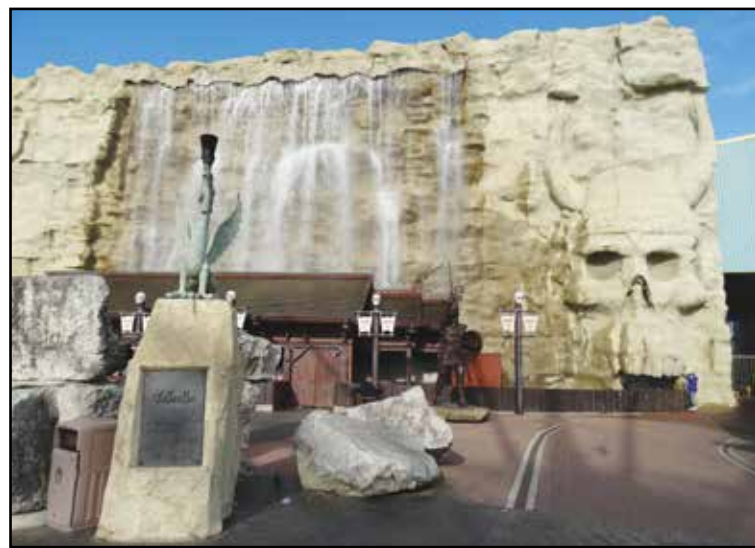
► See RIDES, page 25



BEST DARK RIDE: Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Disney's Hollywood Studios AT/TIM BALDWIN



BEST CAROUSEL: Grand Carousel, Knoebels Amusement Resort COURTESY KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT RESORT



BEST WATER RIDE: Valhalla, Blackpool Pleasure Beach AT/TIM BALDWIN

BLACKPOOL PLEASURE BEACH

Valhalla



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#3 BEST NEW RIDE (WATER PARK):
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#5 BEST NEW RIDE (WATER PARK):
UNIVERSAL VOLCANO BAY'S
KO'OKIRI BODY PLUNGE

► **RIDES**

Continued from page 18

head battle to remain on the charts: **Efteling** (Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands) and **Six Flags Great America** (Gurnee, Illinois).

Noah's Ark at **KENNYWOOD** maintains a charming sense of nostalgia with simple fun. It keeps the Golden Ticket for **BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH ATTRACTION**. In contrast to many such attractions that go for scares, Noah's Ark delights everyone with smiles.

Ghost Ship at **Morey's Piers** (No. 2) holds its position. The final three finalists are in a close race, with only a ballot or two keeping them separate. **Frankenstein's Castle** at **Indiana Beach** (No. 3), **Gasten Ghost Hotel** at **Liseberg** (No. 4), and **Lustiga Huset** at **Gröna Lund** (No. 5) all claim their devoted fans.

Kings Island, the sole possessor of the Golden Ticket for **BEST KIDS' AREA** since the category was created in 2001, does it again for a 17th straight win. The mix of children's coasters, small rides, splash-



BEST KIDS' AREA: Planet Snoopy, Kings Island
AT/TIM BALDWIN

ing areas and bright colors has long resonated with voters.

Despite that, the list of finalists over the years has been ever-changing. The rest of the 2017 list varies greatly in comparison to last year. Universal's Islands of Adventure not only hops back on the chart, but does so all the way up to No. 2. Efteling (No. 3) slips a notch, while **Europa-Park** finds itself on the charts for the first time with both its new Ireland section combined with the park's Grimm's Enchanted Forest placing at No. 4. Dropping a couple of

spaces, but still on the charts, is **Paulton's Park** (No. 5) and its Peppa Pig World.

Little has changed, at least for now, in regard to **BEST INDOOR COASTER**. **Revenge of the Mummy** at Universal Studios Orlando still has people screaming, and it takes the Ticket. **Space Mountain** at **Disneyland** places No. 2. The only change from last year is a tie for third between **Space Mountain** at Magic Kingdom and **Winjas** at PhantasiaLand. **Black Diamond** (No. 5) at Knoebels completes the finalist list.



BEST FUN HOUSE/WALK-THROUGH ATTRACTION: Noah's Ark, Kennywood
COURTESY KENNYWOOD



BEST INDOOR ROLLER COASTER: Revenge of the Mummy, Universal Studios Orlando
COURTESY UNIVERSAL STUDIOS ORLANDO

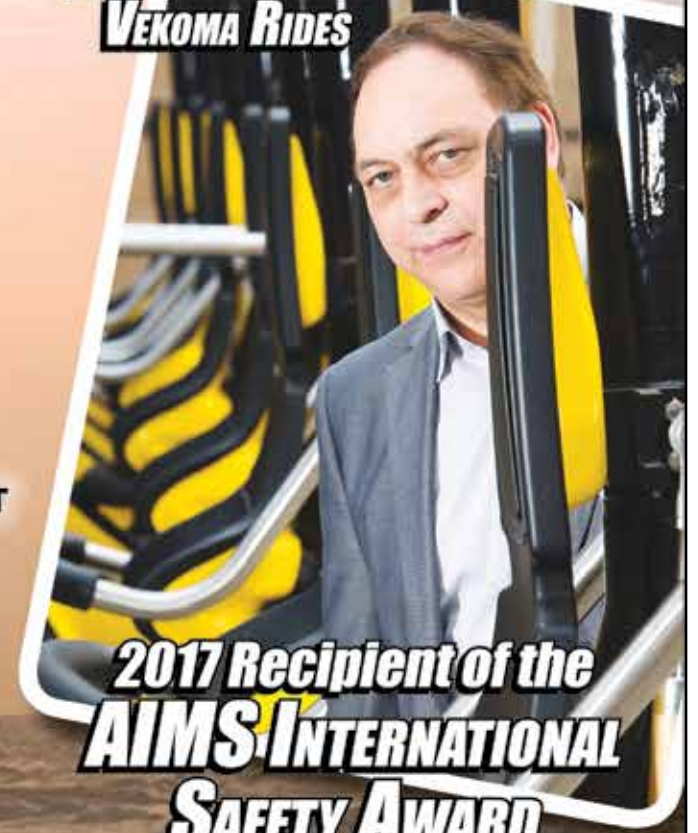
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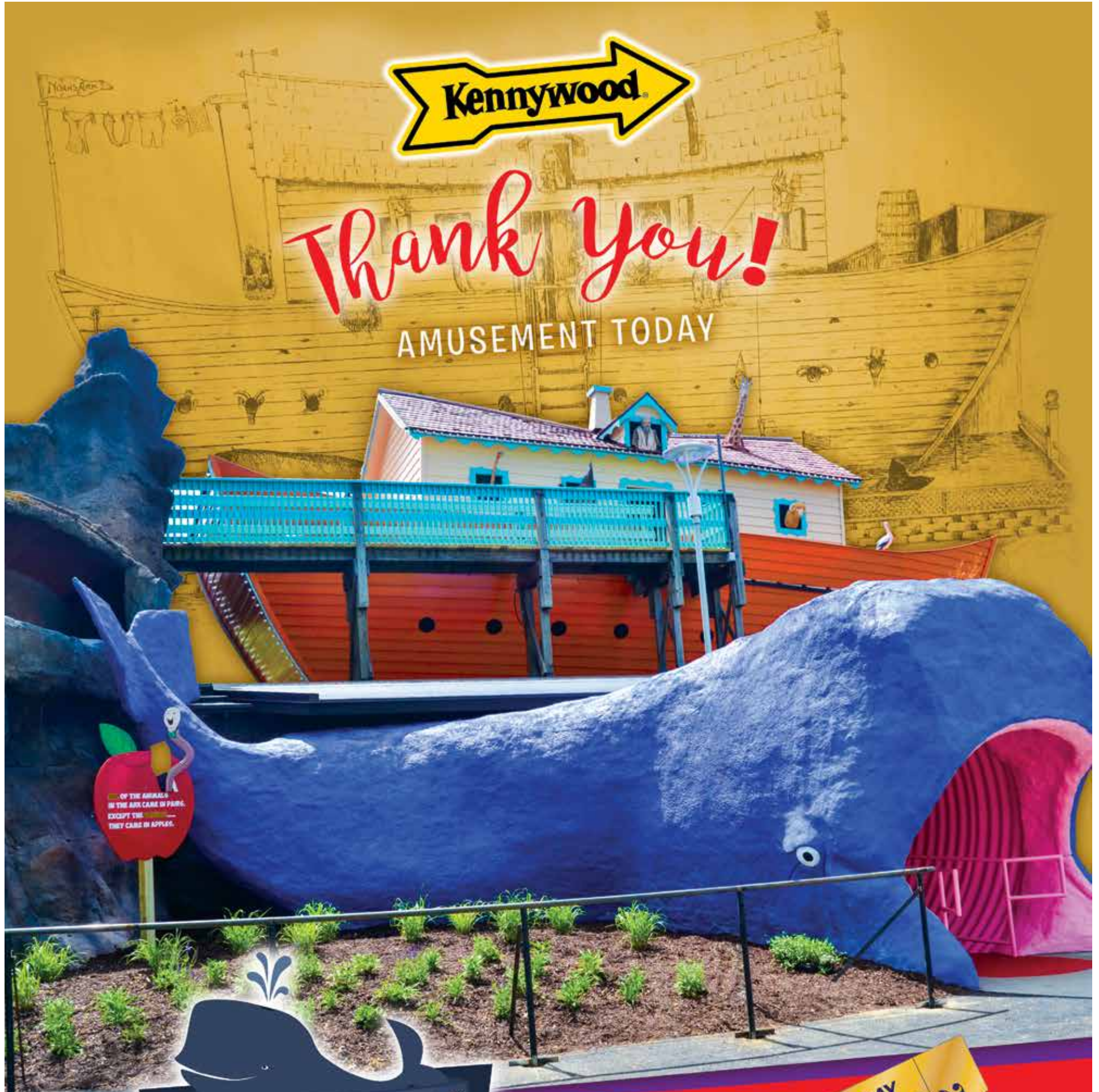
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Kings Island and Six Flags Fiesta Texas take Best New Rides

Kings Island is no stranger to the Golden Tickets. As one of the earliest hosts for the awards ceremony, the Ohio theme park has collected many an award over the years. One particular award eluded the park in 2009, and this year turned out to be the opportunity for Kings Island to get its due.

In 2009, the park debuted the incredible **Diamondback** hyper coaster. Although the voting for the **Bolliger & Mabillard** steel giant was strong, sister park **Worlds of Fun** took **BEST NEW RIDE** for the **Great Coasters International**-built **Prowler**. In 2014, Kings Island built its second B&M high-profile coaster. Again, the park witnessed a strong showing, but still a second-place win for **Banshee**. With the addition of its own new GCI wooden coaster, Kings Island takes the Golden Ticket this year for **Mystic Timbers**.

"After **Prowler** at **Worlds of Fun** edged out **Diamondback** for Best New Ride in 2009, we knew we needed to add a modern day wooden roller coaster by **Great Coasters International** to our lineup – a ride that would appeal to both thrill seekers and families," said Don Helbig, area manager, digital marketing. "Mystic Timbers isn't the tallest or fastest roller coaster, and it doesn't break any records. The ride experience it delivers, however, is fun, thrill-



ing and memorable. It's a ride our guests just can't get enough of. **Mystic Timbers** is very reminiscent of how it was back in 1979 when **The Beast** debuted. As soon as the ride ends, our guests want to get right back in line to ride it again."

Mystic Timbers pushed boundaries for a wooden coaster by adding a show element produced by **Holovis** at the ride's finale with alternate endings prompting riders to wonder what creatures they may see on that particular trip.

Disney's **Animal Kingdom** truly came into its own as a full-day park with the introduction of **Pandora** this season. The big attraction anchoring the new land is **Flight of Passage**. The multi-sensory, movie-meets-flying simulator has drawn huge crowds. The heavily themed attraction places at No. 2.

Mine Blower, supplied by **The Gravity Group**, exploded onto the scene mid-summer at **Fun Spot** in Kissimmee. The ride is the only wooden track coaster to go upside down in Florida and charts at No. 3.

InvadR (No. 4) at **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** is another GCI creation and is the first woodie at the award-winning beautiful theme park. **Wave Breaker** (No. 5), supplied by **Intamin**, puts **SeaWorld San Antonio** on the list of finalists.

In the water park side of the industry, **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** takes the gold with **Thunder Rapids**. Built by **ProSlide**, the attraction is the largest Rocket Blast water coaster ever built.

Park President Jeffrey Siebert felt the fact that it was the first of its kind in America resonated with voters. "Thunder Rapids is the perfect way to combat Texas' extreme heat. The guest response has been...wow...epic. The thrilling appeal of our new water coaster rivals that of its dry counterparts," he said.

Volcano Bay, Orlando's new kid on the block scored two finalists in this category:



BEST NEW RIDE: Mystic Timbers, Kings Island COURTESY KINGS ISLAND



BEST NEW RIDE (WATER PARK): Thunder Rapids, Six Flags Fiesta Texas COURTESY SIX FLAGS FIESTA TEXAS



BEST NEW RIDE, No. 2: Flight of Passage, housed inside the new environment of Pandora, Disney's Animal Kingdom AT/TIM BALDWIN



BEST NEW RIDE, No. 3: Mine Blower, Fun Spot America COURTESY FUN SPOT



BEST NEW RIDE (WATER PARK), No. 2: Krakatau Aqua Coaster, Volcano Bay AT/TIM BALDWIN

Krakatau Aqua Coaster (No. 2) and **Ko'okiri Body Plunge** (No. 5). Both are notable for the massive size for each type. **Krakatau Aqua Coaster** is an exceptionally long hydro-

magnetic water coaster, and **Ko'okiri** is the tallest drop capsule slide in the world — both of which partially reside inside the park's heavily themed volcano.

Miss Adventure Falls, a family raft ride at **Typhoon Lagoon**, and **Point Plummet**, a drop capsule slide at **Cedar Point Shores** tie for third place.

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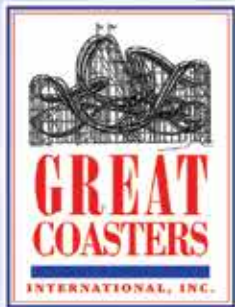
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#2 BEST NEW WATER PARK RIDE:
UNIVERSAL VOLCANO BAY'S KRAKATAU WATER COASTER



#2 BEST WATER RIDE:
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Dollywood a finalist in four cornerstones; wins two Golden Tickets

It's a given that high-profile rides and a multitude of park experiences are the big highlights of a park visit. But equally important are the industry cornerstones of cleanliness, friendliness, great food options and beautiful landscaping that enhance what is a complete daily guest experience.

It's not hard to say that **Dollywood** has this down. The park is a finalist on all these Golden Ticket categories, claiming two wins among the bunch.

In somewhat of a throw down, both Dollywood and **Knoebels Amusement Resort** have been wrestling for the bragging rights for **BEST FOOD** for several years. Both have claimed the prize and also created an exact tie in 2013, the only tie for a Golden Ticket in AT's history. This year, Dollywood takes it once again, keeping the back-and-forth battle intact. Knoebels is at Ms. Parton's heels with a close second place finish.

"We are thrilled to be recognized for our food program," Pete Owens, director of communications, told *Amusement Today*. "Our guests love the big skilletts we have across the park and especially our cinnamon bread. Many tell us it is their reason to visit."

"Winning this year over Knoebels and the other final-



ists is a huge honor. Whether you eat their pierogis or pizza, they make great food and they are tough competition!"

Epcot (No. 3) and **Silver Dollar City** (No. 4) maintain the same positions from 2016. Returning to the charts is **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** (No. 5).

Cleanliness is a goal every park attempts to achieve. Faced with thousands of guests on property every day, it is a challenge. To stand out, parks must really show dedication.

Holiday World and **Splashin' Safari** have been on a mission for many, many years. Long recognized as a park that places a big importance on cleanliness, Holiday World instills this among its staff and has once again taken the Golden Ticket for **CLEANEST PARK**.

Dollywood (No. 2) and **Europa-Park** (No. 3) land on the charts with the same rankings from last year, while Busch Gardens Williamsburg moves up a notch climbing to No. 4. Completing the rankings is a return of **Magic Kingdom** at No. 5.

In one of AT's very few



BEST LANDSCAPING: Busch Gardens, Williamsburg COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS

undefeated categories, **BEST LANDSCAPING** continues to be claimed by Busch Gardens Williamsburg.

"We are fortunate to have such a tremendously talented landscape team here in Williamsburg," said David Cromwell, president. "They take great pride in creating experiences that matter for our guests and bring our parks to life by cultivating visually distinct environments."

Of note, Busch Gardens is a noticeable finalist of three

of the categories on this page. Positions 2, 3 and 4 are respectively held by the parks on the 2016 charts: **Gilroy Gardens**, **Efteling** and Dollywood. Brand new on this list of elites is **Disney's Animal Kingdom** at No. 5. It's worth noting that this newcomer wowed audiences with a blend of authentic landscaping and otherworldly flora in its new Pandora section.

Dollywood once again has the prize in **FRIENDLIEST PARK**. The theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., was the

third park to take the Golden Ticket in this category in 2012. This is the sixth year in a row to do so.

Familiar finalists have their spots from last year. Holiday World (No. 2), Silver Dollar City (No. 3) and Knoebels (No. 4) are known for outstanding courtesy. New for 2017 is finalist **Alabama Splash Adventure**. Pat Koch (of Holiday World fame), lovingly known as "The General," has impressed this value upon the workers at the park.



CLEANEST PARK: Holiday World & Splashin' Safari COURTESY HOLIDAY WORLD & SPLASHIN' SAFARI



FRIENDLIEST PARK: Dollywood COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



BEST FOOD: Dollywood COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

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Festivals and shows keep guests entertained

If one is to examine the amusement industry and trends that mold how parks operate, it isn't actually that long ago when the core season was considered Memorial Day to Labor Day. Nowadays, countless parks are finding some of its most attended days long after Labor Day has passed.

Halloween is huge. It's undeniable. Haunted festivals at parks get more elaborate each year and crowds are eating it up.

Forging ahead at full scream is **Universal Studios Orlando**. The park's Halloween Horror Nights has taken the Golden Ticket for **BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT** for many years.

"Guests come to Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Orlando from across the state, the region and beyond to experience what we have created," said Rich Costeles, senior VP of Resort Operations, Universal. "It is the perfect blend of content, scare and entertainment to share with your friends or family. Many of our guests tell us they come to Central Florida because of Halloween Horror Nights — and that it has become an annual tradition for them. That helps motivate us to make it better every year."

At No. 2 is **Knott's Berry Farm**. It also claims legions of fans and is famous for its Halloween Haunt. The park has also taken the Golden Ticket twice in the past.

On a more regional level, two Pennsylvania parks are having a howling good time. **Knobels** (No. 3) brings in many people for its spooky offerings, and **Kennywood** (No. 4) has experienced success with its Phantom Fright Nights.



A three-way tie completes our group of finalists. **Busch Gardens Tampa** clings onto the chart, but shares the space with new blood, if you will, with **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** and **Universal Studios Hollywood**. Some fans have become rather loyal to USH commenting that Orlando shouldn't receive all the love.

In sharp contrast, once blood, gore and mayhem are taken down, it is quickly replaced with joy and merriment. With each season, new festivals are appearing around the country as parks are extending their calendars even further.

The finalists in **BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT** are similar to last year, if not slightly jumbled. **Dollywood** remains the undefeated champ when it comes to all things merry. Inching up is sister park **Silver Dollar City** into the No. 2 spot. Moving down a



BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT: Universal Studios Orlando COURTESY UNIVERSAL RESORT

spot and rising up a notch creates a tie for third, and it is all things Mickey magic. **Disneyland** and **Magic Kingdom** have successfully captured the Christmas spirit. Kennywood (No. 5) rounds out the finalist list.

Often a good show will let guests cool off and rejuvenate, but in a few cases, it is a primary purpose for a

visit. Whether it is song and dance, night extravaganzas, animal shows or something much more, many parks take show product seriously.

For **BEST SHOWS**, Dollywood has now made it a nine-year run. Coming in second is Six Flags Fiesta Texas, which held the Golden Ticket win for a full decade.

With both of these renowned parks at the top, other parks are challenged to be noticed. Making our charts are **SeaWorld Orlando** and Silver Dollar City tied at third and newcomer **Disney's Hollywood Studios** following, making for five finalists.



BEST SHOWS: Dollywood — Dolly Parton's performance influence helps the park take home its ninth straight in the category. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



BEST CHRISTMAS EVENT: Dollywood — Dollywood remains the undefeated champion in wishing guests a Merry Christmas. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

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Carowinds' Fury 325 widens lead as Best Steel Coaster

Long-time champ **Millennium Force** at **Cedar Point** was slightly outpaced in the 2016 balloting. After holding the Golden Ticket for ten years as **BEST STEEL COASTER** — more than any other coaster — Millennium Force found a new challenger at sister park **Carowinds**, which barely nudged in the lead last year. In 2017, **Fury 325** has sprinted significantly out in front. Built in 2015 by **Bolliger & Mabillard**, Fury 325 raced to the top in short time.

“Our goal at the conception of Fury 325 was to build a new giga coaster that was not just a taller ride than Cedar Point’s Millennium Force, but we were wanting to lower the ride profile after the drop. The concept gave B&M the opportunity to maintain inertia throughout the ride to maximize airtime and deliver sensational high-speed elements,” said Rob Decker, senior vice president of planning and design, Cedar Fair. “The positioning of the ride, especially the fly over/fly under element positioned directly in front of the park entrance was deliberate to generate excitement for our guests upon their arrival by replicating the powerful movements of stock car racing on the high banked turns — a nod to the roots of racing in the Carolinas. We are thrilled with the guest reaction to the ride, the high capacity and reliable delivery from B&M, which is, of course, stellar.”

“Fury 325 has given more than 4.6 million rides and counting,” says Pat Jones, Carowinds’ vice president and general manager. “The smiles,



screams and laughter from guests vowing to conquer North America’s longest steel coaster gives us a sense of gratification. The Carowinds team would like to give a virtual high-five to all who voted for Fury 325. Winning the award for the second year in a row is the icing on the cake.”

The top three positions remain the same with **Superman The Ride** at **Six Flags New England** holding firmly in third place.

But it stops there. None of the steel coasters remaining in the Top Ten are in the positions they were in 2016.

The biggest leap came from **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** and its signature ride, **Iron Rattler**. Always a solid contender, the wood-steel hybrid coaster slithered into the Top Ten in a big way at the No. 4 position. Iron Rattler is now the highest-rated coaster for **Rocky Mountain Construction**.

Expedition GeForce at Germany’s **Holiday Park** has long been the highest rated coaster, wood or steel, outside of the U.S. Ranking at No. 5, it gives **Intamin** three coasters within the Top Five.

Climbing up one step further, **Leviathan** at **Canada’s Wonderland** places at No. 6. Combined with **Nitro** at **Six Flags Great Adventure** (No. 7) and **Diamondback** at **Kings Island** (No. 8), it makes three in a row for B&M.



BEST STEEL COASTER, No. 2:
Millennium Force, Cedar Point
AT/TIM BALDWIN



BEST STEEL COASTER, No. 4:
Iron Rattler, Six Flags Fiesta Texas
AT/GARY SLADE



BEST STEEL COASTER, No. 3:
Superman The Ride, Six Flags New England
COURTESY SIX FLAGS NEW ENGLAND



BEST STEEL COASTER, No. 5:
Expedition GeForce, Holiday Park
COURTESY HOLIDAY PARK

Returning to the Top Ten (No. 9) is RMC’s **New Texas Giant**, a Golden Ticket winner for **Six Flags Over Texas** when it debuted as **BEST NEW RIDE** in 2011.

Rounding out the Top Ten is Cedar Point’s **Maverick**, which is the highest the coaster has ever ranked. It gives Cedar Point two Top Ten steel

coasters and four in the Upper 25, the only park to do so. Of note, with the inclusion of Iron Rattler and Maverick, roller coasters that go upside down have now made a return to the Top Ten after an absence last year.

Three roller coasters have now moved up into the Top 25 chart. **Twisted Colossus**

at **Six Flags Magic Mountain** has moved up to No. 16, **Taron** at **Phantasialand** jumps 11 places up to No. 21, and **Hersheypark’s Skyrush** places on the chart at No. 24. [The full chart of 50 can be seen at GoldenTicketAwards.com.]

On the complete list of 50, 13 coasters operate outside of the United States.



BEST STEEL COASTER: Fury 325, Carowinds
AT/GARY SLADE



Twisted Colossus at Six Flags Magic Mountain made the highest jump to land into the Top 25. AT/TIM BALDWIN

THE LIST

2017 TOP 25 STEEL ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR	TOTAL
1	Fury 325	Carowinds	Charlotte, N.C.	B&M	2015	1354
2	Millennium Force	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2000	1129
3	Superman The Ride	Six Flags New England	Agawam, Mass.	Intamin	2000	705
4	Iron Rattler	Six Flags Fiesta Texas	San Antonio, Texas	RMC	2013	657
5	Expedition GeForce	Holiday Park	Hassloch, Germany	Intamin	2001	575
6	Leviathan	Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, Ontario, Canada	B&M	2012	481
7	Nitro	Six Flags Great Adventure	Jackson, N.J.	B&M	2001	442
8	Diamondback	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	B&M	2009	381
9	New Texas Giant	Six Flags Over Texas	Arlington, Texas	RMC	2011	379
10	Maverick	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	B&M	2007	375
11	Apollo's Chariot	Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, Va.	B&M	1999	374
12	Phantom's Revenge	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	Morgan	2001	344
13	Intimidator 305	Kings Dominion	Doswell, Va.	Intamin	2010	330
14-tie	Goliath	Six Flags Over Georgia	Austell, Ga.	B&M	2006	291
14-tie	Wicked Cyclone	Six Flags New England	Agawam, Mass.	RMC	2015	291
16	Twisted Colossus	Six Flags Magic Mountain	Valencia, Calif.	RMC	2015	284
17	Top Thrill Dragster	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Intamin	2003	276
18	Blue Fire	Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	Mack	2006	272
19	Intimidator	Carowinds	Charlotte, N.C.	B&M	2010	261
20	Nemesis	Alton Towers	Staffordshire, England	B&M	1994	254
21	Taron	Phantasialand	Brühl, Germany	Intamin	2016	253
22	Banshee	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	B&M	2014	244
23	Magnum XL-200	Cedar Point	Sandusky, Ohio	Arrow	1989	238
24	Skyrush	Hersheypark	Hershey, Pa.	Intamin	2012	235
25	X2	Six Flags Magic Mountain	Valencia, Calif.	Arrow	2002	217

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El Toro makes a surprise return as Top Wooden Coaster

Much like an unforeseen election upset, **El Toro** at **Six Flags Great Adventure** returns to the No. 1 position in *AT*'s **BEST WOODEN COASTER** category. Built in 2006, the **Intamin** giant had claimed top billing once before on the charts in 2012 and has been a Top Ten staple for the past decade.



"The industry recognition for **El Toro** is well deserved for a ride this spectacular," said Park President Neal Thurman. "Wooden coasters are a special breed within the amusement community and there is a lot of competition out there. This honor just goes to prove that **El Toro** is, without a doubt, the best wooden coaster in the world. We are grateful for and encouraged by all those who voted."

Holding strong in its No. 2 position is **Phoenix** at **Knoebels**. Last year, this 1985 woodie — one of only two to rank in *AT*'s Top Ten for 20 years — reached its highest placement yet. For decades, the wooden coaster has served as one of the purest triumphs for preservation, and in an era when many parks are giving up on wooden coasters, it stands as a vivid example as to what fine maintenance can do.

"Our team at **Knoebels** is dedicated to maintaining a superlative environment for our guests,"



BEST WOODEN COASTER:
El Toro, Six Flags Great Adventure
AT/JEFFREY SEIFERT

said Dick Knoebel, owner. "This includes safety, maintenance, staff friendliness, and overall ambiance. Keeping a 68-year-old champion roller coaster in tip-top condition is a challenge, but one that we can and wish to do for our guests. The praise **Phoenix** receives from riders both old and young is a testament

to the fact that a well-designed wooden roller coaster, coupled with meticulous maintenance, can be timeless."

Boulder Dash at **Lake Compounce** (No. 3) and **The Voyage** at **Holiday World** (No. 4), both of which have held the Golden Ticket for five years each (the most any wooden coaster has held the award) are still among the top elite. In fact, the top three rankings are all within 70 points of each other.

Lightning Rod at **Dollywood** has leaped into the Top Five after its No. 11 debut last year. It has passed the other wooden coaster at the park, **Thunderhead** (No. 8), and makes **Dollywood** the only park with two wooden coasters in the Top Ten. Which poses two questions: Can **Lightning Rod** enter that tight race for first next year, and can another park find two woodies in the Top Ten? **Kings Island** claims a Top Ten Woodie — **The Beast** — at the No. 6 spot, but also the new **Mystic Timbers** makes its first-year debut at No. 11, just outside that Top Ten mark. **Mystic Timbers** is also the only new-for-2017 coaster to chart, at least for this year.

The Top Ten is completed with **Ravine Flyer II** at **Waldameer** (No. 7), **Outlaw Run** at 2018 GTA host **Silver Dollar City** (No. 9) and **Gold Striker** at **California's Great America** (No. 10).



BEST WOODEN COASTER, No. 3:
Boulder Dash, Lake Compounce
COURTESY LAKE COMPOUNCE



BEST WOODEN COASTER, No. 4: The Voyage, Holiday World
AT/DAN FEICHT



BEST WOODEN COASTER, No. 5: Lightning Rod, Dollywood
COURTESY DOLLYWOOD



BEST WOODEN COASTER, No. 2:
Phoenix, Knoebels Amusement Resort
AT/TIM BALDWIN

The highest leap for perhaps any coaster ever is **Boardwalk Bullet** at **Kemah Boardwalk**. Last season, it barely made it to the chart at No. 50. This year it jumps an impressive 36 slots to place at No. 14.

Several other coasters made considerable strides. Two coasters — **White Lightning** at **Fun Spot America** and **Rampage** at **Alabama Splash Adventure** — each rose 16 spaces putting them firmly in the upper 25. **Knott's Berry Farm** now places its **Great Coasters International**-rejuvenated **Ghost Rider** back in the upper 25 after it jumped up 11 spots. **Europa-Park's** **Wodan** climbed up eight notches to now be the highest ranking international wooden coaster (No. 15), passing **Balder** at **Liseberg** (No.

16) by a hair. In the complete chart containing the full 50, 11 international coasters can be found within the wooden roller coaster rankings.

Two parks not only boast three wooden roller coasters, but **Holiday World** has all three in the Top 25: **The Voyage** (No. 4), **The Raven** (No. 23) and **The Legend** (No. 24); **Six Flags St. Louis** has all three listed in the Top 50: **The Boss** (No. 28), **American Thunder** (No. 40) and **Screamin' Eagle** (No. 43).

The oldest coaster on the charts — **Kennywood's** **Jack Rabbit** — still thrills at No. 26, and the 1927 **Cyclone** at **Luna Park** now returns to the Top 25 at No. 22.

A complete list of 50 coasters can be seen at GoldenTicketAwards.com.



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2017 TOP 25 WOODEN ROLLER COASTERS



RANK	NAME	PARK	LOCATION	SUPPLIER	YEAR	TOTAL
1	El Toro	Six Flags Great Adventure	Jackson, N.J.	Intamin	2009	1241
2	Phoenix	Knoebels Amusement Resort	Elysburg, Pa.	Dinn-PTC/Schmeck	1985	1212
3	Boulder Dash	Lake Compounce	Bristol, Conn.	Custom Coasters	2000	1171
4	Voyage	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	Gravity Group	2006	1113
5	Lightning Rod	Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	Rocky Mountain	2016	710
6	Beast	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	KECO	1979	666
7	Ravine Flyer II	Waldameer	Erie, Pa.	Gravity Group	2008	612
8	Thunderhead	Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	Great Coasters Int.	2004	560
9	Outlaw Run	Silver Dollar City	Branson, Mo.	Rocky Mountain	2013	541
10	Gold Striker	California's Great America	Santa Clara, Calif.	Great Coasters Int.	2013	489
11	Mystic Timbers	Kings Island	Mason, Ohio	Great Coasters Int.	2017	345
12	Lightning Racer	Hersheypark	Hershey, Pa.	Great Coasters Int.	2000	276
13	Goliath	Six Flags Great America	Gurnee, Ill.	Rocky Mountain	2014	269
14	Boardwalk Bullet	Kemah Boardwalk	Kemah Boardwalk	M&V/Gravity Group	2007	236
15	Wodan	Europa-Park	Rust, Germany	Great Coasters Int.	2012	223
16	Balder	Liseberg	Gothenburg, Sweden	Intamin	2003	221
17	Thunderbolt	Kennywood	West Mifflin, Pa.	Vettel/Miller	1968	220
18-tie	GhostRider	Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Vista, Calif.	Custom Coasters	1998	219
18-tie	Troy	Toverland	Sevenum, Netherlands	Great Coasters Int.	2007	219
18-tie	White Lightning	Fun Spot America	Orlando, Fla.	Great Coasters Int.	2013	219
21	Rampage	Alabama Splash Adventure	Bessemer, Ala.	Custom Coasters	1998	218
22	Cyclone	Luna Park	Brooklyn, N.Y.	Keenan/Baker	1927	217
23	Raven	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	Custom Coasters	1995	214
24	Legend	Holiday World	Santa Claus, Ind.	Custom Coasters	2000	198
25	Shivering Timbers	Michigan's Adventure	Muskegon, Mich.	Custom Coasters	1998	197

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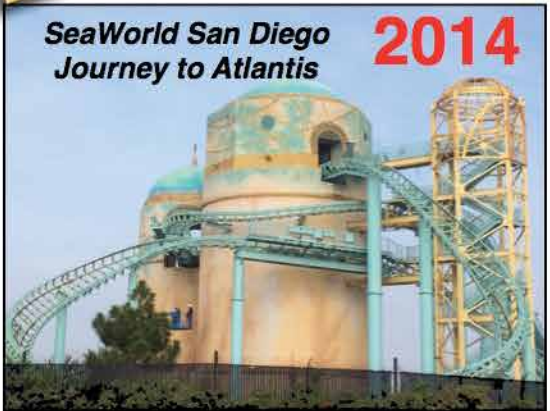
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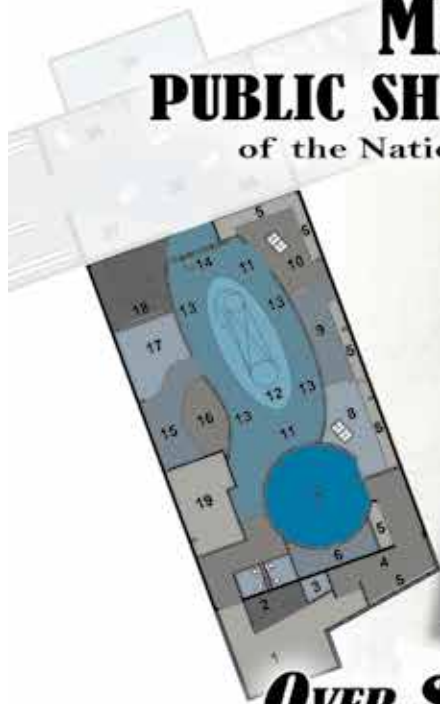
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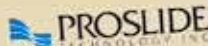
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